

THE PERIL OF THE SUBMARINES

Meantime, sinkings were proceeding at such a pace that out of every 100 long-voyage steamers which left this country, 25 failed to return. At this rate, Germany's expectation of bringing us to our knees by August did not seem so improbable an inference to be drawn from the actual facts.

Admiral Sims definitely favoured convoys. Writing on 19th April to his Government, he reported the British methods in use and their *Admiral Sims* expressed his dissent from the Admiralty view that convoys were impracticable.

"They are also insistent that it is impracticable for merchant ships to proceed in formation, at least in any considerable numbers, due principally to difficulty in controlling their speed and to the inexperience of their subordinate officers. With this view I do not personally agree but believe that with a little experience merchant vessels could safely and sufficiently well steam in open formations."¹⁵

The situation was anxiously discussed by the War Cabinet in three sessions of 23rd and 25th April. In alluding to the recent serious shipping losses, I referred to the possibility of the *Cabinet* adopting the convoy system, which, I said, was favoured by Admiral Beatty and by Admiral

Sims.

The First Sea Lord reported that the matter was under consideration, one of the chief obstacles to adopting such a scheme being the shortage of torpedo-boat destroyers. He stated that there was some prospect of American destroyers being sent to